

**Remarks at a Veterans Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia**  
*November 11, 2011*

Thank you, Ric Shinseki, for your extraordinary service to our country and your tireless commitment to our veterans; to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta; to Chairman Dempsey and Mrs. Dempsey; to our wonderful veterans service organizations for the extraordinary work that you do for our Nation's heroes; to all who tend to and watch over this sacred cemetery; and above all, to every active duty member, guardsman, reservist, and veteran of the United States Armed Forces.

There are many honors and responsibilities that come with this job, but none are more humbling than serving as your Commander in Chief. And I'm proud to be with so many of you here today.

Here, where our heroes come to rest, we come to show our gratitude. A few moments ago, I laid a wreath to pay tribute to all who have given their lives to our country. For even though this is a day we rightly honor America's veterans, we gather today in solemn respect, mindful that we are guests here, mindful that we share this hallowed space with a family's moment of quiet grief, mindful that many veterans not far from here are tracing their fingers over black granite for friends who never came home and expect us to do all we can to bring every missing American servicemember home to their families.

To all our Nation's veterans: Whether you fought in Salerno or Samarra, Khe Sanh or the Korengal, you are part of an unbroken chain of men and women who have served this country with honor and distinction. On behalf of a proud and grateful nation, we thank you.

When I spoke here on this day 2 years ago, I said there would be a day before long when this generation of service men and women would begin to step out of uniform. And I made them a promise. I said that when your tour ends, when you see our flag, when you touch our soil, you will be home in an America that is forever here for you, just as you've been there for us.

For many, that day has come. Over the past decade, more than 5 million Americans have worn the uniform of the United States Armed Forces. Of these, 3 million stepped forward after the attacks of September 11th, knowing full well that they could be sent into harm's way. And in that time, they have served in some of the world's most dangerous places. Their service has been selfless. Their accomplishments have been extraordinary.

In Iraq, they have battled a brutal insurgency, trained new security forces, and given the Iraqi people the opportunity to forge a better future. In Afghanistan, they have pushed back the Taliban, decimated Al Qaida, and delivered the ultimate justice to Usama bin Laden. In concert with our allies, they have helped end Qadhafi's brutal dictatorship and returned Libya to its people.

Because of their incredible efforts, we can stand here today and say with confidence: The tide of war is receding. In just a few weeks, the long war in Iraq will finally come to an end. Our transition in Afghanistan is moving forward. My fellow Americans, our troops are coming home.

For many military families, this holiday season will be a season of homecomings. And over the next 5 years, more than 1 million Americans in uniform will transition back to civilian life, joining the nearly 3 million who have done so over the past decade and embraced a proud new role, the role of veteran.

This generation of servicemembers, this 9/11 generation, has borne the burden of our security during a hard decade of sacrifice. Our service men and women make up less than 1 percent of Americans, but also more than 1 million military spouses and 2 million children and millions more parents and relatives, all of whom have shared the strains of deployment and sacrificed on behalf of the country that we love.

Only 27 years old on average, these young men and women have shattered the false myth of their generation's apathy, for they came of age in an era when so many institutions failed to live up to their responsibilities. But they chose to serve a cause greater than their selves. They saw their country threatened. But they signed up to confront that threat. They felt some tug, they answered some call, and they said, let's go. And they've earned their place among the greatest of generations.

That is something for America to be proud of. That is the spirit America needs now, a stronger, newer spirit of service and of sacrifice. That spirit that says, "What can I do to help? What can I do to serve?" That spirit that says, "When my country is challenged, I will do my part to meet that challenge."

So on this Veterans Day, let us commit ourselves to keep making sure that our veterans receive the care and benefits that they have earned, the opportunity they defend and deserve, and above all, let us welcome them home as what they are, an integral, essential part of our American family.

See, when our men and women sign up to become a soldier or a sailor, an airman, marine, or coast guardsman, they don't stop being a citizen. When they take off that uniform, their service to this Nation doesn't stop either. Like so many of their predecessors, today's veterans come home looking to continue serving America however they can. At a time when America needs all hands on deck, they have the skills and the strength to help lead the way.

Our Government needs their patriotism and sense of duty. And that's why I've ordered the hiring of more veterans by the Federal Government. Our economy needs their tremendous talents and specialized skills. So I challenged our business leaders to hire 100,000 post-9/11 veterans and their spouses over the next few years, and yesterday many of these leaders joined Michelle to announce that they will meet that challenge.

Our communities have always drawn strength from our veterans' leadership. Think of all who have come home and settled on in a quiet life of service—as a doctor or a police officer, an engineer or an entrepreneur, as a mom or a dad—and in the process, changed countless lives. Other veterans seek new adventures, from taking on a new business to building a team of globetrotting veterans who use skills learned in combat to help after a natural disaster.

There are also so many in this young generation who still feel that tug to serve, but just don't quite know where to turn. So on this Veterans Day, I ask every American, "Recruit our veterans." If you're a business owner, hire them. If you're a community leader—a mayor, a pastor, or a preacher—call on them to join your efforts. Organize your community to make a sustained difference in the life of a veteran, because that veteran can make an incredible difference in the life of your community.

If you're a veteran looking for new ways to serve, check out [serve.gov](http://serve.gov). If you're a civilian looking for new ways to support our veterans and our troops, join Michelle and Jill Biden at [joiningforces.gov](http://joiningforces.gov). Find out what you can do. There is no such thing as too small a difference. That effort you make may have the biggest impact.

I say this because recently, I received a letter from a Vietnam veteran. She wasn't writing to tell me about her own experience. She just wanted to tell me about her son Jeremy. Now, Jeremy isn't deployed, Jeremy's not a veteran or even in the military at all, as badly as he wants to follow in the footsteps of his family and enlist. You see, Jeremy has Down syndrome.

So Jeremy chooses to serve where he can best, with his local Vietnam Veterans of America chapter in Beaver, Pennsylvania. He calls them "the soldiers." And one day last spring, Jeremy spent the day with several of these veterans cleaning up a local highway.

"He worked tirelessly," wrote his mother. "He never asked to take a break. He didn't stop to talk about his beloved Steelers. He didn't even ask for anything to eat or drink. He only asked one thing, several times: 'Mom, will President Obama be proud of me for helping the soldiers?' "

Well, Jeremy, I want you to know, yes, I am proud of you. I could not be prouder of you, and your country is proud of you. Thank you for serving our veterans by helping them to continue their service to America.

And Jeremy's example—one young man's example—is one that we must all now follow. Because after a decade of war, the nation we now need to build is our own. And just as our greatest generation left a country recovering from depression and returned home to build the largest middle class in history, so now will the 9/11 generation play a pivotal role in rebuilding America's opportunity and prosperity in the 21st century.

We know it will be hard. We have to overcome new threats to our security and prosperity, and we've got to overcome the cynical voices warning that America's best days are behind us. But if there is anything our veterans teach us, it's that there is no threat we cannot meet, there is no challenge we cannot overcome. America's best days are still ahead. And the reason for that is because we are a people who defy those voices that insist otherwise. We are a country that does what is necessary for future generations to succeed.

You, our veterans, fight so our children won't have to. We build and we invent and we learn so that we will know greater opportunity. America leads so that the next generation, here and around the world, will know a more hopeful life on this Earth.

So today, I thank you all for making that possible. God bless you. God bless our veterans and our troops, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:40 a.m. at Arlington National Cemetery. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki; Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, USA, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff and his wife Deanie Dempsey; and Teresa Carr and her son Jeremy Carr of Beaver, PA.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Veterans Day ceremony in Arlington, VA.

*Locations:* Arlington, VA.

*Names:* Biden, Jill T.; Carr, Jeremy; Carr, Teresa; Dempsey, Deanie; Dempsey, Martin E.; Obama, Michelle; Panetta, Leon E.; Shinseki, Eric K.

*Subjects:* Afghanistan : Afghan military and security forces; Afghanistan : Former regime; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Defense, Department of : Joint Chiefs of Staff; Defense, Department of : Secretary; Government organization and employees : Veterans, Federal employment opportunities; Holidays and special observances : Veterans Day; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Libya : No-fly zone :: U.S. military forces; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist group; Terrorism : September 11th, 2001, attacks; Veterans : Access to health and medical care; Veterans : Service and dedication; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Secretary; Virginia : Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington; Virginia : President's visit; Voluntarism.

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